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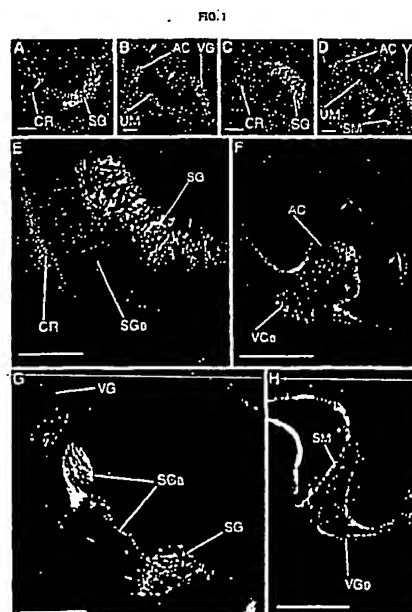
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(54) **SEMAPHORIN RECEPTOR**

(57) The present invention provides screening methods for agonists or antagonists of *Sema6C* using *Plexin-A1*, and tools for the screening and the like. It evaluates a case of making a recombinant protein having an extracellular domain of *Semaphorin 6C* contact a protein having an extracellular domain of *Plexin-A1* by comparing it with a case of contacting a recombinant protein and a target substance having an extracellular domain of *Semaphorin 6C*, or the target substance with a protein having an extracellular domain of *Plexin-A1*. The evaluation will be carried out by the connectivity of a protein having an extracellular domain of *Semaphorin 6C*, a growth cone collapse activity of *Plexin-A1* expressing cell, or a contractile activity of *Plexin-A1* expressing cell.



Description

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention is based on a finding that a receptor for Semaphorin 6C (hereafter, abbreviated as Sema6C) is Plexin-A1. More specifically, the present invention relates to screening methods for agonists or antagonists for Sema6C using Plexin-A1, and screening tools for the screening and the like.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Semaphorins constitute a large family of more than 20 kinds of secretory and transmembrane proteins, and are classified into 8 classes (Cell 97, 551-552, 1999). Many of the semaphorins function as a chemorepellent or an attractant against nerves, and regulate the guidance of axons, nerve fiber fasciculation and branching, and synaps formation. (For overview, see Annu. Rev. Neurosci. 19, 341-377, 1996, Science 274, 1123-1133, 1996). In particular, it has shown that Class 3 secretory semaphorins have strong activities of growth cone collapse and against axons of dorsal root ganglion (DRG) neurons or sympathetic ganglion neurons. (Cell 75, 217-227, 1993, Cell 75, 1389-1399, 1993, Neuron 14, 263-274, 1995, Neuron 14, 949-959, 1995, Neuron 14, 941-948, 1995, Eur. J. Neurosci. 8, 1317-1321, 1996, Neuron 18, 193-207, 1997).

[0003] It has been shown that Neuropilins (Neuropilin-1 and Neuropilin-2) bind to Class 3 Semaphorins (Neuron 19, 547-559, 1997, Cell 90, 739-751, 1997, Cell 90, 753-762, 1997). It is also known that by inactivating Sema3A (previously, Semaphorin D, a member of Class 3 Semaphorin) gene (Neuron 19, 519-530, 1997) or Neuropilin-1 gene (Neuron 19, 995-1005, 1997) in the mouse by targeted gene disruption, the abnormal guidance of peripheral nervous fibers or the induction of dendrite formation were recognized, and Neuropilin-1 is necessary for transmitting chemical reactive signals induced in Sema3A.

[0004] On the other hand, Plexin is a membrane glycoprotein, that has originally been identified in *Xenopus tadpole* nervous tissue (Dev. Biol. 122, 90-100, 1987, Neuron 9, 151-161, 1992, Neuron 14, 1189-1199, 1995). Several kinds of Plexins have been identified in various animals, which have been classified into 4 subfamilies, that is, Plexin-A, -B, -C and -D (Cell 99, 71-80, 1999). In mice or human, at least 3 kinds of Plexin belonging to Plexin A subfamily, that is, Plexins A1, A2 and A3 have been identified [previously Plexins-1, -2 and -3 in the mice respectively (Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 396-402, 1996, Biochem Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 524-529, 1996), and NOV, OCT and SEX in the human, respectively (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 93 674-678, 1996)]. An ectodomain (extracellular domain) of Plexin A subfamily has repeats of three units of a cysteine cluster similar to cysteine-rich domain present

in c-Met and Met-related receptor protein tyrosine kinases [they are called C1, C2 and C3 (Neuron 14, 1189-1199, 1995) or Met-related sequence (MRS; Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 93, 674-678, 1996) (for overview, see Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 93, 674-678, 1996; Dev. Neurosci. 19, 101-105, 1997). Further, the approximately 500 amino acids (aa) residues between the N-terminal of Plexin and the first cysteine cluster is significantly homologous to Sema domains shared by Semaphorin family (Cell 75, 217-227, 1993, Cell 75, 1389-1399, 1993, Trends Cell Biol. 6, 15-22, 1996, Eur. J. Neurosci. 8, 1317-1321, 1996).

[0005] Our previous studies using *Xenopus* has shown that Plexin is expressed in neurons constituting specific nervous domains such as the optic tectum (Dev. Biol. 122, 90-100, 1987), inner plexiform layer of the retina and photoreceptor cells (Neuron 9, 151-161, 1992) the olfactory system, the lateral neural circuit, and the auditory equilibrium system (Neuron 14, 1189-1199, 1995), and suggested that Plexins are involved in neuron cell contact (Neuron 14, 1189-1199, 1995), nervous fiber guidance and fasciculation (J. Neurosci. 15, 942-955, 1995), or organization of the inner plexiform layer of the retina (Neuron 9, 151-161, 1992). However, the molecular nature of Plexins and its role in the development of a nervous system are not understood well.

[0006] Some recent studies show that Plexins function as receptors for semaphorins. Plexin-C1 (VESPR), which has two cysteine clusters rather than three in an ectodomain is expressed in cells derived from the lymphatic system, and is used as a receptor for SemaVA, a Class V Semaphorin encoded and secreted by Poxvirus (A39R; Immunity 8, 473-382, 1998). A research on *Drosophila* (Cell 95, 903-916, 1998) show that Plexin A is used as a receptor transmitting chemorepulsive signals induced by Sema-1a, a Class 1 Semaphorin, and is shown that it regulates the nervous fiber fasciculation in CNS or motor neurons.

[0007] A recent study on the interaction between Plexins and Semaphorins (Cell 99, 71-80, 1999) elucidates that Sema4D, a Class 4 Semaphorin, binds to Plexin-B1, Sema7A, a Class 7 Semaphorin (GPI anchor-type) binds to Plexin C1. Further, members of Plexin-A subfamily (Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3) form a complex with neuropilins (Neuropilin-1 and Neuropilin-2), and transmit Sema3A signals, a Class 3 Semaphorin, into cells (Cell 99, 59-69, 1999, Cell 99, 71-80, 1999). All these insights suggest a possibility that Plexins are receptor molecules crucial to transmit some semaphorin signals independent of Neuropilins. However, since Semaphorins have various structures and functions, receptors for Semaphorins and their the signal transmission mechanisms may vary, depending on the Semaphorin classes. At present, the receptors of Class 6 Semaphorins have not been identified yet, and their relationships with Plexins have not been elucidated.

[0008] The present invention is based on the insight that a receptor for Sema6C, a member of Class 6 Sem-

aphorin, is Plexin-A1, and the object of the present invention is to provide screening methods for agonists or antagonists of Sema6C using Plexin-A1, and tools for the screening. Since Sema6C has the growth cone collapse activity against nerve cells and cell contraction activity, screening methods in the present invention are useful for selecting therapeutic agents or preventive agents for patients by promoting or inhibiting these activities.

[0009] The present inventors produced a transfectant expressing Plexin-A, and keenly screened a ligand which is a Plexin-A subfamily member using this. As a result of this, we found that a Class 6 transmembrane Semaphorin, a Sema6C (SemaY; Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999) specifically binds to Plexin-A1, and the recombinant proteins of the ectodomain (extracellular domain) of Sema6C induce contraction of fibroblasts or collapse of growth cones in the nerve cells, that express Plexin-A1, and we demonstrated that a receptor of a transmembrane semaphorin Sema6C is Plexin-A1. Accompanied by finding that a receptor of a Sema6C is Plexin-A1, it became possible to screen agonists or antagonists of Sema6C using Plexin-A1.

[0010] It is well known that Sema6C has a growth cone collapse activity (WO98/11216 pamphlet, Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999), and it is shown that the screening of antagonists of Sema6C is useful in developing promoting agents for neural regeneration (WO 98/11216 pamphlet). In the present invention, since a receptor for Sema6C is identified, it became possible to perform more effective and highly specific screening using Plexin-A1.

[0011] In particular, since Sema6C binding sites and Plexin-A1 are localized to the auditory system, and Sema6C has a growth cone collapse activity, the Sema6C is considered to be relevant to the suppression of auditory nerve elongation or the collapse of growth cone. The Sema6C is also considered to be relevant to the suppression of olfactory nerve elongation or the collapse of their growth cones. Therefore, the screening methods in the present invention is useful in screening for a therapeutic agents or preventive agents for various neural diseases, in particular auditory and/or olfactory nervous diseases. Since Sema6C also a cell contraction activity, the screening methods in the present invention can be used to screen agents that suppress or enhance cell migration using the contraction of cells expressing Plexin-A1 as an index. The methods can be used to screen therapeutic agents or preventive agents for the promotion of blood vessel formation migration of malignant cells.

[0012] Further, the present invention specifically has shown for the first time that Plexin-A1 is specifically expressed in the auditory neurons (all ganglia and nuclei constituting to auditory pathway). Therefore, the antisense strands of DNA/RNA encoding Plexin 1 or the antibodies against Plexin-A1 can be used for diagnosing auditory or olfactory nervous diseases.

[0013] Based on the insights mentioned above, the present invention has been completed.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[0014] The present invention relates to a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C, comprising a step of making a protein with an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 contact with a target substance in vitro (claim 1), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 1, comprising a step of comparing and evaluating (i) a case of making a recombinant protein with an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C contact with a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 with (ii) a case of making a recombinant protein with an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C and a target substance, or a target substance contact with a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 (claim 2), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to either of claim 1 or 2, wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C is a protein bound to a marker protein and/or a peptide tag (claim 3), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 3, wherein the marker protein is alkaline phosphatase or an immunoglobulin Fc domain (claim 4), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein a cell membrane or a cell expressing a protein with an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is used (claim 5), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 5, wherein a cell membrane or a cell expressing a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is a transformed cell wherein the DNA encoding a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is preserved in a stable manner (claim 6), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 6 wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is a recombinant protein (claim 7), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 7, wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is Plexin-A1 (claim 8), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 2 to 8, comprising a step of detecting the presence or absence of a signaling arising from an interaction between a protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C and a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 (claim 9), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 9, wherein the signaling is a connectivity of a protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C against a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin A1, a growth cone collapse activity, or a contractile activity of a Plexin-A1 expressing cell (claim 10), a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Sem-

aphorin 6C, comprising a step of injecting a target substance to non-human animals and evaluating Plexin-A1 activity (claim 11), a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C comprising a step of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and evaluating the Plexin-A1 activity (claim 12), a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C, wherein the target substance is injected to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and its Plexin-A1 activity is assessed and compared with that of wild-type non-human animals (claim 13), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 11 to 13, wherein the Plexin-A1 activity is a growth cone collapse activity against a neural cell or a contractile activity against cells (claim 14), the screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 11 to 14, wherein the non-human animals are mice or rats (claim 15), an agonist or for Semaphorin 6C obtainable by a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 15 (claim 16), a pharmacological composition comprising the agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 16 as an active agent (claim 17), the pharmacological composition according to claim 17, useful as an agent for treating and/or preventing auditory and/or olfactory nervous diseases (claim 18), a migration-inhibition agent or migration-enhancement agent of Plexin-A1 comprising the agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 16 as an active agent (claim 19), a fusion protein wherein a protein having an extracellular domain of Class 6 Semaphorin is bound with a marker protein and/or a peptide tag (claim 20), the fusion protein according to claim 20, wherein a Class 6 Semaphorin is Semaphorin 6C (claim 21), the fusion protein according to either of claim 20 or 21, wherein the marker protein is alkaline phosphatase or an immunoglobulin Fc domain (claim 22), a transformant wherein DNA encoding a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is preserved stably (claim 23), a probe used for diagnosing central nervous diseases, comprising whole or part of an antisense strand of DNA or RNA encoding Plexin-A1 (claim 24), the probe used for the diagnosis according to claim 24, wherein the central nerve is an auditory nerve (claim 25), a medicine used for diagnosing central nervous diseases, comprising the diagnostic probe according to claim 24 or an antibody to Plexin-A1 (claim 26), the medicine used for diagnosing auditory nervous diseases according to claim 26, wherein a central nerve is an auditory nerve (claim 27), a screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of culturing in vitro a cell expressing a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 in the presence of the target substance and measuring and evaluating the amount of

Plexin-A1 expression in the cell (claim 28), a screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of culturing in vitro a cell obtained from non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or is excessively expressed in the presence of a target substance, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression in the cell (claim 29), a screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression (claim 30), a screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression (claim 31), a screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacking or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression with that of wild-type non-human animals (claim 32), the screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to any of claims 29 to 32 wherein the non-human animal is mice or rats (claim 33), an agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, obtained by the screening methods for an agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to any of claims 28 to 33 (claim 34), and a pharmacological composition comprising the agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to claim 34 as an active agent (claim 35).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0015]

FIG. 1 shows the results of expressing Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3 in the inner ears by in situ hybridization and immunostaining.

FIG. 2 shows the result of the expression of Plexin-A1, Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 in the central auditory pathway by in situ hybridization and immunostaining.

FIG. 3 shows the result of the expression of Plexin-A1, Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 in the olfactory pathway by in situ hybridization and immunostaining.

FIG. 4 comprises the figures showing the binding of Sema6C-AP against L cells expressing Plexin-A1 (A to D), and the graphs (E, F).

FIG. 5 shows an immunoblotting electroporation of Plexin-A1 in the expressing L cells (A), and the binding of Sema6C to the cultured inferior colliculus neurons and the auditory pathway.

FIG. 6 comprises graphs showing the growth cone

collapse activity of Sema6C.

FIG. 7 comprises the figures showing morphological changes in cells induced by Sema6C (A, B), and the graphs (C to E).

BEST MODE TO CARRY OUT THE INVENTION

[0016] "A protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1" used for screening agonists or antagonists of Sema6C in the present invention may be either a natural type or a recombinant. Further, although Plexin-A1 is preferably human-type, Plexin-A1 derived from other species such as mouse-type can be used for the same purpose. The sequence of amino acids and the sequence of bases in mouse-type Plexin-A1 are published in the reference (Biochem. Biophys. Res. Comm. 226, 524-529, 1996) or as Genbank accession No: D86948. Further, the sequences of human Plexin-A1 are published in the reference (Cell 99, 71-80, 1999) or as Genbank accession No: X87832), and it is easy to clone using these sequencing information.

[0017] Although the "extracellular domain" of Plexin-A1 refers to the part of the 1st to the 1237th in the sequence of amino acids in Plexin-A1 in the reference, or the part comprising the sequence of amino acids having this part and 10 or less of residues of amino acids in a forward or backward direction, a sequence of amino acids comprising modifications such as substitution, deletion, addition is also included in the "extracellular domain" of Plexin-A1, as long as the ability of binding to Sema6C is maintained.

[0018] The "protein having an extracellular domain in Plexin-A1" in the present invention refers to part or whole of the proteins of Plexin-A1 having at least the extracellular domain. Since Sema6C binds to an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1, which is a receptor, it can play a role of Plexin-A1 in the screening of the present invention as long as it has the extracellular domain. Preferably, a whole protein of Plexin-A1 is used. Further, not only the natural type but also the one whose part of the amino acid sequence is mutated is induced in the category of the "protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1" as long as it maintains the ability to bind to Sema6C.

[0019] The DNA encoding a protein having part or whole of Plexin-A1 (henceforth, it may be abbreviated as DNA of Plexin-A1 for short, and the expressed product by the DNA may be abbreviated simply as protein of Plexin-A1 for short) can be cloned by using cDNA library and the like derived from human or animal brains with an appropriate part of DNA as probes for hybridization or primers for PCR based on the sequence information set forth in the reference (Cell 99, 71-80, 1999 or Genbank accession No: X87832). The cloning can easily be performed by the people skilled in the art, following introductory books such as Molecular Cloning 2nd Edt., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1989). Further, the mutation can easily be performed by the people

skilled in the art, based on introductory books such as Molecular Cloning 2nd Edt., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press 1989, PCR A Practical Approach, IRL Press p200, 1991). The mutation can preferably be in the domain except for the extracellular domain of Plexin-A1, and preferably be substituted to conserved amino acids.

[0020] As a technique for expressing protein from the DNA obtained in the above-mentioned method, the method mentioned below can be exemplified. That is, firstly the DNA of Plexin-A1 prepared beforehand is inserted into a known expressing vector such as pCAGGS (Gene 108, 193-199, 1991) or pcDNA1.1, pcDNA3.1 inducer (Invitrogen). At the time, it is preferred that it comprises a Kozaks sequence before the first ATG of Plexin-A1. It is possible to produce a transformant which expresses proteins of the Plexin-A1 corresponding to the DNA of the introduced Plexin-A1 on the surface of cells by introducing the product to an appropriate host cell after that. Further, some kinds of the DNA of the used Plexin-A1 can secrete the Plexin-A1 protein in the culture supernatant (for example, in the case of using the DNA encoding only an extracellular domain). Although as a host, L cell, which is a mammal cell strain generally and widely-spread, CHO cell, C127 cell, BHK21 cell, BALB/c3T3 cell (including the mutant strains where dihydrofolate reductase and thymidine kinase are lacking) or COS cell, there is no such restriction, and insect cells, yeasts or bacteria can also be used.

[0021] A method of introducing the Plexin-A1 expressing vector into a host cell can be any method of introducing as long as it is a method of introducing a well-known vector into a host cell, and can be exemplified by a method using calcium phosphate transfection (J. Virol. 52, 456-467, 1973), a method using LT-1 (Panvera), transfection lipids (Lipofectamine, Lipofection; Gibco-BRL) and the like.

[0022] As for the transformants wherein the transferred genes are conserved in a chromosome of an animal cell in a stable manner (so-called stable transformant), there are a number of cases where they are difficult to obtain, depending on the kinds of transfected genes, and as for Plexin-A1, there are no known examples of obtaining a stable transformant. We attempted a variety of results such as adjusting methods of recombinant cells in the present invention, and we succeeded for the first time to obtain a transformant conserving the DNA of Plexin-A1 in a stable manner.

[0023] The transformant wherein Plexin-A1 is expressed on the surface of a cell obtained as mentioned above can be used for the screening system with no modification as mentioned below, and in the case where cell membranes of the transformant are used for screening, for example, a cell membrane can be prepared as mentioned below. That is, a precipitation of a cell membrane fraction is obtained by first adding hypotonic homogenate buffer (10 mM of tris-hydrochloride, 1 mM of EDTA, 0.5 mM of PMSF or 1 mM of AEBSF, 5 µg/ml of

aprotinin, 5 µg/ml of leupeptin; pH7.4) and leave it for about 30 min. at 4°C to destroy the cells hypotonically, then homogenize them by pipetting, and centrifugate for 30 min. at 50,000×g at 4°C to obtain precipitation. Further, cell membrane fractions of the present invention can be obtained by suspending the precipitation into tris-hydrochloride buffer physiological saline solution (tris-hydrochloride, 154 mM of sodium chloride; pH7.4).

[0024] The cell membrane fractions of the present invention can be obtained by such methods as in F. Pietri-Rouxel (Eur. J. Biochem., 247, 1174-1179, 1997).

[0025] Further, as described below, there are cases where Plexin-A1 which is isolated can be used for screening by itself, and the transformants obtained as mentioned above or Plexin-A1 isolated from the cell membrane fractions can be used in such cases. More concretely, crude extracts containing Plexin-A1 can be obtained by a method described in R. G. Shorr et al. (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA, 79, 2778-2782, 1982, J. Biol. Chem. 257, 12341-12350, 1982) and others. Further, as a method of purifying Plexin-A1 from the crude extracts, it can be a method in J. L. Benovic et al. (Biochem., 23, 4510-4518, 1984).

[0026] Still further, Plexin-A1 can be purified by a normal method from a culture supernatant in the case where Plexin-A1 (for example, an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1) is secreted from a transformant, as described above, for example using a column bound to an anti-Plexin-A1 antibody, and in the case where normal peptide tags are added to an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1, using a column bound to a substance having affinity with this tag.

[0027] Sema6C of the present invention used to be called SemaY (Semaphorin Y) once, the sequences of bases and of the sequences of amino acids of rat- and human-type are disclosed in International Publication No: 98/11216 pamphlet and Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999. Sema6C has a splicing isoform where 96 base pairs in the extracellular domain are not deleted, and it has been shown that both the isoform (Sema6C-L) and the isoform where 96 base pairs are deleted (Sema6C-S) have an activity (growth cone collapse activity) (International Publication No: WO98/11216 pamphlet and Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999). Therefore, it is possible to use one or both of the two isoforms for the screening. Further, a modified protein undergoing modification such as substitution or deletion of the sequence of amino acids can be used, as long as it has essentially the same characteristics as Sema6C.

[0028] As described below, in the screening of the present invention, the protein comprising an extracellular domain of Sema6C can be used as a control to measure the activity of the target substance. Further, since an extracellular domain of Sema6C binds to an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1, it serves as Sema6C in the screening of the present invention as is the case of Plexin-A1, as long as it has at least an extracellular domain of Sema6C.

[0029] Although an "extracellular domain" of Sema6C here refers to a portion of a sequence of the 1st to the 599th amino acids in Sema6C in the reference, or a portion of a sequence of amino acids which comprise the portion and 20 or less of its forward or backward residues of the amino acids, the one containing recombination such as substitution, deletion, addition and others is included in the domain of "extracellular domain" of Sema6C, as long as it has the activity of binding to Plexin-A1, the growth cone collapse activity, and/or it has a cell contraction.

[0030] A "protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C" in the present invention refers to part or whole of proteins of Sema6C having at least the extracellular domain part. Further, not only a natural type but also the one wherein part of the sequence of amino acids are recombinant such as substitution, deletion, and addition is included in the category of the "protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C", as long as it is possible to bind to Plexin-A1.

[0031] The DNA encoding a protein having part or whole of Sema6C can be cloned by using cDNA library derived from a brain or a muscle and the like, using appropriate portions of DNA as a probe for hybridization or as a primer for PCR, based on the sequence information disclosed in International Publication No: 98/11216 pamphlet and Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999. Such cloning can easily be performed by a person in the art, following an introductory book such as Molecular Cloning 2nd Ed., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press 1989 and others. Further, such a recombination can easily be performed by a person in the art, following an introductory book such as Molecular Cloning 2nd Ed., Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1989, PCR A Practical Approach IRL Press p200, 1991 and others. Such a recombination is preferably performed in the part other than the extracellular domain of Sema6C, and further, substitution to conserved amino acids is preferable.

[0032] As a method to express proteins from the DNA obtained in a way mentioned above, the same method used for Plexin-A1 mentioned above can be used as well.

[0033] To perform the screening of the present invention more simply, the present inventors, as a result of various attempts, produced a fusion protein wherein a marker protein and/or a peptide tag are/is bound to a protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C, and found that the fusion protein shows a conservation of a biological activity as well as a clear binding to Plexin-A1 and that it can eligibly be used as a screening tool of the present invention. Such a fusion protein mentioned above, especially in a case of a protein whose tertiary structure is unclear, is difficult to obtain due to the problems such as the lack of the amount of the expression in a transformed cell, the lost of biological activity, the decline of stability and others caused by the fact that the protein is a fusion protein, the production of the fusion

protein has never been succeeded with respect to Sema6C or with respect to any of Class 6 Semaphorin to which Sema6C belongs.

[0034] Since the present invention showed that a fusion protein of a protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C is obtained, the fusion protein binds to Plexin-A1, which is a receptor, and it conserves biological activity, as described above, such fusion proteins can be produced with members of Class 6 Semaphorin (Sema6A, Sema6B) other than Sema6C following the description set forth in the specification, and it is evident that the fusion protein can bind to the receptor. Therefore, the present invention is to provide a fusion protein wherein an extracellular domain of Class 6 Semaphorin are bound together with a marker protein and/or a peptide tag.

[0035] As a marker protein refers to here, any well-known marker protein can be exemplified by, for example, alkaline phosphatase (Cell 63, 185-194, 1990), Fc region of an antibody (Genbank accession number M87789), HRP and others. Among others, alkaline phosphatase is the most preferable.

[0036] A "peptide tag" is exemplified by well-known peptide tags such as Myc tag (Glu-Gln-Lys-Lue-Ile-Ser-Glu-Glu-Asp-Ile), His tag (His-His-His-His-His-His), FLAG tag (Asp-Tyr-Lys-Asp-Asp-Asp-Asp).

[0037] Furthermore, the one wherein a marker protein or a peptide tag is bound to an extracellular domain of Class 6 Semaphorin mentioned above is useful not only for screening but also as a marker for diagnosing nervous abnormality (especially a marker for diagnosing auditory nervous abnormality), and as a reagent used for research in the field.

[0038] An "agonist of Sema6C" in the present invention refers to a substance that binds to Sema6C and/or Plexin-A1, which is a receptor, and affects a downstream signaling molecular to induce a Sema6C-like function by itself, or a substance that binds to Sema6C and/or Plexin-A1, which is a receptor, and affects a downstream signaling molecule to strengthen a function of Sema6C. Further, an "antagonist of Sema6C" in the present invention refers to a substance that inhibits a function of Sema6C by binding to Sema6C and/or Plexin-A1, which is a receptor, or affecting a downstream signaling molecule.

[0039] Methods for screening an agonist or an antagonist of Sema6C by using the screening tools mentioned above can roughly be classified into a method of making a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 contact in vitro with a target material, and a method of injecting in vivo the subject substance to non-human animals, and each of them are explained below.

[0040] First, as a screening method for an agonist or an antagonist of Sema6C of the present invention characterized by making a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 contact with a subject substance in vitro can concretely be illustrated by the following three methods:

1) Methods using a cell wherein Plexin-A1 protein is expressed

[0041] As a method of performing a screening of the present invention using a cell expressing a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 produced by the description mentioned above, the following illustrated methods can concretely exemplified.

[0042] That is, in screening for an antagonist following the description described above, Sema6C-S-AP, a fusion protein is produced from extracellular domain of Sema6C-S (short variant) and alkaline phosphatase (AP), together with following the above description. On the other hand, a transformant expressing Plexin-A1 protein on the surface of a cell is produced following the description mentioned above. Next, the connectivity of the Sema6C-S-AP to a cell is detected by alkaline phosphatase activity (i) when Sema6C-S-AP is added, and (ii) when Sema6C-S-AP or a target substance is added. In the cases where AP in (ii) has a lower the level of activity than that in (i), or shows no activity, it is shown that the target substance is an antagonist of Sema6C. See the examples for more detail. Further, it is possible to use as an index the fact that the target substance inhibits the change of a cell observed when Sema6C is added to the cell expressing Plexin-A1 protein, when the same experiment mentioned above is performed instead of the connectivity of Sema6C-S-AP to a cell expressing Plexin-A1 protein. A "change of a cell" used here refers to the growth cone collapse or shrinkage and others.

[0043] Further, in screening for an agonist of Sema6C, the responses such as growth cone collapse, shrinkage of a cell shown by the cells expressing Plexin-A1 proteins are compared, for example, with a transformant wherein Plexin-A1 proteins are expressed on the surface of a cell, (i) when Sema6C-S-AP is added, and (ii) when a target substance is added or when Sema6C-S-AP and a subject substance are added. In the case where the same or similar responses are recognized in the case (i) and the case (ii) where only a target substance is added, it shows that the subject substance is an agonist of Sema6C. Further, in the case where a function of Sema6C is strengthened as observed when Sema6C-S-AP is added by adding the target substance, it is considered as an agonist. See the examples for more detail.

[0044] As a cell expressing Plexin-A1 protein, it is convenient to use a cell wherein a recombinant Plexin-A1 protein is expressed on the surface of a cell as mentioned above. However, since it is found from the present invention that nervous cells such as cultured inferior colliculus neuron or dorsal root ganglion (DRG) neuron express Plexin-A1 proteins on the surface of the cell, such neural cells can be used for the screening in the present invention as well. For the culture of such cells, refer to International Publication WO98/11216 pamphlet or the examples described below.

[0045] There is no particular restrictions on a concrete method of detection, as long as the method can detect the presence or absence of signaling arising from the interaction between a protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C and a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1. The screening of the present invention can be performed by the measurement of the morphological changes of a cell (Cell 99, 59-69, 1999, see also the examples described below), and the measurement of the growth cone collapse (International Publication 98/11216 pamphlet and Moll. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999, see also the examples described below), other than the cases where the connectivity of a protein having an extracellular domain of Sema6C against a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 as described above.

2) Methods using cell membranes wherein a Plexin-A1 protein is expressed

[0046] Instead of using a cell wherein a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is expressed on the surface of a cell, the screening of the present invention can be performed by using a cell membrane prepared from the cell, following the same method as in section 1). In this case, the connectivity to a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is measured.

3) Methods using a protein having an extracellular domain of isolated and purified Plexin-A1

[0047] The screening of the present invention can be performed using a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 isolated and purified based on the description mentioned above. The connectivity to a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is measured in this case as well.

[0048] Next, a screening method for an agonist or an antagonist of Sema6C of the present invention characterized in that Plexin-A1 activity is evaluated by injecting a subject substance to non-human animals can concretely be exemplified by the following ways.

[0049] A method for screening an agonist or an antagonist of Semaphorin 6C can concretely be exemplified by injecting a target substance to wild-type non-human animals such as rats or mice, and/or non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is deficient or excessively expressed on a chromosome, and evaluating or comparing/evaluating Plexin-A1 activities such as a growth cone collapse activity or a contractile activity against a cell.

[0050] In the present invention, non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is deficient on a chromosome refers to non-human animals wherein part or whole of a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 becomes inactivated on a chromosome by gene recombination such as destruction/deficiency/substitution and the like, and the function of expressing Plexin-A1 is lost,

and non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is excessively expressed on a chromosome refers to non-human animals producing Plexin-A1 more massively than wild-type non-human animals. Further, although it can correctly be exemplified by non-human animals including rodents such as mice and rats as non-human animals in the present invention, it is not limited to these.

[0051] Further, since homozygote mice born following Mendel's laws include a type deficient of or a type excessively expressing the gene functions encoding Plexin-A1 and the wild-types born from the same mothers, and comparative experiments can be carried out precisely at the individual levels by using deficient-type and excessively expressive-type homozygote mice and their wild-type mice born from the same mothers, it is preferable to use wild-type non-human animals, that is, animals of the same type as non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding the Plexin-A1 is deficient or excessively expressed on a chromosome, further, it is preferable to use animals born from the same mother together, for example, in screening an agonist or an antagonist such as Sema6C. A method of producing non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is deficient or excessively expressed on a chromosome is explained below using Plexin-A1 knockout mice or Plexin-A1 transgenic mice as an example.

[0052] A Plexin-A1 knockout mouse is specified by screening a gene encoding Plexin-A1 using a gene fragment obtained from a mouse gene library by PCR or other methods using DNA sequencing, and subcloning using a gene encoding screened Plexin-A1 A target vector is produced by replacing whole or part of a gene encoding Plexin-A1 in the close with pMC1 neo-gene cassette, and introducing a gene such as diphtheria toxin A fragment (DT-A) gene or thymidine kinase of herpes simplex virus (HSV-tk) on the 3' end.

[0053] The targeting vector prepared is linearized, introduced into an ES cell by electroporation and others, performed by homologous recombination, and the ES cells showing homologous recombination from the homologous recombinants by antibiotics such as G418 or gancyclovir (GANC) and the like. Further, it is preferable to confirm by the Southern blotting whether a selected ES cell is a target recombinant. The clones of the confirmed ES cells are microinjected into a mouse blastocyst, and the blastocyst is returned to a nursing parent to produce chimera mice. The chimeric mice are intercrossed with a wild-type mouse to obtain a heterozygote mouse, and the heterozygote mouse is intercrossed to produce a Plexin-A1 knockout mouse of the present invention. Further, a method of confirming whether the knockout mouse is produced can be the Northern blotting by isolating RNA from the mouse obtained by the above-mentioned method, or can be the Western blotting by examining the expression of the protein in the mouse.

[0054] As for a Plexin-A1 transgenic mouse, a trans-

gene is constructed by fusing a chicken β actin, mouse neurofilaments, promoters such as SV40, and rabbit β -globin, polyA or intron of SV40 and others are fused to construct a transgene to microinject the transgene to a pronucleus of a mouse fertilized egg. After cultured in the obtained egg cells, the egg was transplanted to an oviduct of a nursing mouse, feed the transplanted animals after that, and is able to generate a transgenic mouse by selecting a baby mouse from having the cDNA from the born baby mice. Further, selection of a baby mouse having the cDNA can be carried out by extracting the crude DNA from a mouse tail and others and performed by a dot hybridization method using a probe as a Plexin-A1 introduced gene as a probe, or PCR and others using a specific primer.

[0055] Since *Sema6C* has an activity of suppressing nervous elongation and a growth cone collapse activity of axons (International Publication 98/11216 pamphlet), the agonist or antagonist of *Sema6C* selected using the screening method in the present invention mentioned above can be used as a pharmaceutical medicine or a preventive medicine for neurotics. That is, an antagonist for *Sema6C* can be used as a pharmaceutical or preventive medicine for neurotics by promoting nervous elongation, an agonist for *Sema6C* can be used as a pharmaceutical medicine or preventive medicine for neurotics by regulating nervous elongation. The screening method of the present invention is useful to select pharmaceutical medicine or preventive medicine for neurotics.

[0056] Specifically, as evident from the fact that the binding domain of *Sema6C* and Plexin-A1 are localized in accordance with an auditory nervous tissue, and *Sema6C* has the growth cone collapse activity against an auditory nerve, the *Sema6C* relates to suppression of elongation of auditory nerves and relates to collapse of growth cones. Therefore, the screening method in the present invention is effective for selection of a pharmaceutical medicine or a preventive medicine for auditory neurotics, and specifically a screening method for an antagonist for *Sema6C* can select a pharmaceutical medicine or a preventive medicine for the diseases with auditory neurotics by promoting the elongation of neurotics.

[0057] Further, since Plexin-A1 is expressed not only in auditory nerves but also olfactory nerves as described below, a screening method of the present invention can effectively be used for screening for pharmaceutical medicine or preventive medicine for olfactory neurotics.

[0058] Further, since it became evident that *Sema6C* had a shrinkage activity against a cell mediating Plexin-A1, a screening method of the present invention can also be used to select migration suppression agents or migration enhancement agent. An agonist for *Sema6C* obtained from the screening can be used, for example, as a pharmaceutical medicine or preventive medicine for the transfer of cancer by suppressing cell migration, and an antagonist for *Sema6C* can be used, for exam-

ple, as an enhancing agent for the neogenesis of blood vessel by enhancing cell migration, using the shrinkage of a cell expressing Plexin-A1 as an index.

[0059] The present invention is to provide pharmaceutical medicines or preventive medicines for auditory and/or olfactory neurotics obtained by the screening methods, or migration-suppression agents or enhancement agents for cells expressing Plexin-A1, and more concretely, for example, it can be a low molecular compound obtained by performing the screening neutralizing antibody against *Sema6C*, recombinant proteins of *Sema6C* and low molecular compound library (International Publication WO98/1121 pamphlet).

[0060] The present invention also provides a probe for diagnosing a disease at the central nervous system, comprising whole or part of an antisense strand of DNA or RNA encoding Plexin-A1, and a diagnosing agent for a disease at the central nervous system comprising the probe.

[0061] As described in the examples below, the tissue distribution of Plexin-A1 was revealed for the first time in the present invention using the methods of in situ hybridization and immunostaining. That is, Plexin-A1 is specifically expressed in the nerves of the auditory systems (more concretely, the cochlear nervous, the ventral nucleus and dorsal nucleus, the upper olive nucleus group, the trapezoid body, the dorsal and ventral lateral lemniscus nuclei, the inferior colliculus, the medial geniculate body, the auditory area of the cerebral cortex), and Plexin-A1 is also expressed in the nerves of the olfactory systems (more concretely, the vomeronasal organ and sensory epithelium in the nasal cavity, mitral cells and granular cells in the olfactory bulb, the lateral olfactory striae, the amygdaloid nucleus).

Therefore, the presence or absence of diseases and the status of the disease in progression can be detected in the nervous tissues mentioned above, especially in the auditory systems by performing in situ hybridization of Plexin-A1 against, for example, a pathological tissue.

[0062] There is no particular limitations as long as it is whole or part of an antisense strand of DNA or RNA (cRNA) encoding Plexin-A1, and it is has a length (at least 20 bases or more) enough to hold as a probe. More concretely, the part of position 564-2732 of the OFR of Plexin-A1 can be given as an example. To use the probe as an active component of a diagnosing agent, it is preferable to lyse it to appropriate buffers or aseptized water in which a probe will not be decomposed. Further, as an in situ hybridization, it can, for example, be a method described in J. Neurobiol. 29, 1-17, 1996. It is also possible to adopt an in situ PCR method. Also refer to the examples described below.

[0063] In the diagnosis, not only a probe but also an antibody against Plexin-A1 can also be used, and immunostaining can be used in this case. (Dev. Biol. 170, 207-222, 1995; J. Neurobiol. 29, 1-17, 1996, see the examples described below). An antibody can be prepared by a method described, for example, in Antibodies; A

Laboratory Manual, Lane, H. D. et al (eds.), Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, New York, 1989).

[0064] The present invention also provides screening methods for agents suppressing or enhancing Plexin-A1 expression or agents, by culturing in vitro together with a target substance the cells expressing proteins having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 or the cells obtained from non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or is expressed excessively on chromosomes, then administering the target substance to non-human animals and others wherein the cells expressing proteins having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 or the gene functions encoding Plexin-A1 are deficient or express excessively on chromosomes, and then measuring/evaluating an amount of expression of Plexin-A1. When administering a target substance to non-human animals, it is possible to compare/evaluate a case of using wild-type non-human animals such as mice or rats and a case of using non-human animals wherein a gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is deficient or express excessively on chromosomes.

[0065] For example, to explain more concretely a screening method using a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 and a target substance, the expressing cell under the existence of a target substance, detecting the decrease or increase of the amount of proteins having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 expressed on a surface of a cell membrane for a specific period after culturing, by immunochemistry or by using as an index the suppression or enhancement of mRNA. A method of detecting mRNA used here can be performed by DNA chip, northern hybridization and others, and other methods, and when using a cell transfected with a gene associated with a reporter protein such as luciferase at a downstream of Plexin-A1 promoter, it is possible to detect the suppression or enhancement of expressing Plexin-A1 gene by a target substance using an activity of the reporter gene as an index. Agents suppressing or enhancing Plexin-A1 expression selected by the screening can be used as a pharmacological composition used for treating a patient requiring the strengthening of Plexin-A1 expression, as a pharmacological composition used for treating a patient requiring the suppression of Plexin-A1 expression, for example, as a treating agent or a preventive agent for a patient having a disease caused by a disorder of Plexin-A1 expressing cells such as auditory nerves. More concretely, it can be an auditory disorder or an olfactory disorder.

EXAMPLES

[0066] In the following, the present invention will be explained more concretely using examples. The present invention, however, will not be restricted by the examples in any fashion.

EXAMPLE 1 (Production of a monoclonal antibody specific to Plexin-A1)

[0067] a cDNA fragment encoding amino acids (aa) 86 to 480 of a mouse Plexin-A1 protein is cloned by a normal method in pET-3c vectors (Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun, 226, 524-529, 1996) to transfect it to a coliform. The expression and purification of a recombinant protein was performed by a reported method (J. Neurobiol. 29, 1-17, 1996). The lysate of recombinant proteins (5 ml/ml) was mixed with the same amount of Titer-Max (CytRx), and it was injected to a planter of rats (Wistar; Chubu Kagaku Shizai) anesthetized heavily with ether four times with each interval of two hours. On the third day after the last additional immunization, the lymphocytes obtained from inguinal and popliteal lymph nodes are fused with marrow cells (P3X63Ag8U1) by a previously described method (Dev. Biol. 122, 90-100, 1987). Hybridoma cells are cultured using Dulbecco's modified Eagle medium (DMEM; Nissui) containing 10% of Fetal Bovine Serum (FBS; JRH Bioscience) and 10% of hybridoma cloning factors (Igen). Screening of hybridoma clones are performed by an ELISA assay, followed by a reported method (Meth. Enzymol. 92, 168-174, 1983). The supernatant of a hybridoma culture positive to an ELISA assay is further treated for immunostaining of a tissue segment, and isolate Plexin-A1 specific hybridoma clone p1192.

[0068] A monoclonal antibody p1192 against a Plexin-A1 recombinant protein is used to examine the distributions of Plexin proteins in the nervous system. While this antibody bound to a cell expressing Plexin-A1 (see Fig. 4A), it did not bind to a cell expressing Plexin-A2 or a cell expressing Plexin-A3. In the immunoblotting of a mouse embryonic brain, it is found that the monoclonal antibody p1192 bound to a band of 180kDa, which is considered to be a Plexin-A1 protein (see Fig. 5A). Further, while the binding patterns of the monoclonal antibody p1192 against a tissue segment correspond to the localization of mRNA of Plexin-A1 detected by in situ hybridization (ISH), it obviously differs from the localization of mRNA of Plexin-A2 or Plexin-A3. From the results mentioned above, it is shown that the monoclonal antibody p1192 specifically recognizes a Plexin-A1 protein.

EXAMPLE 2 (immunostaining)

[0069] An embryo or a brain at various developmental stages or after a birth of an ICR mouse (Chubu Kagaku Shizai) was settled overnight in 10 mM of phosphate-buffer saline buffer (PBS: pH7.4) containing 4% of paraformaldehyd. Following the reported methods (Dev. Biol. 170, 170, 207-222, 1995; J. Neurobiol. 29, 1-17, 1996), frozen segments (14 μ m for the thickness) were prepared from an embryonic mouse brain or a brain of a mouse after birth, and were subjected to immunochemistry. First, after treating prepared frozen segments with anti-Plexin-A1 antibodies (p1192), anti-rat

IgG antibodies (Amersham) fluorescence (cy-2 or cy-3) labeled to an anti-Plexin-A1 antibody were bound to the segments, and were observed under presence of the fluorescent microscope. Further, the day where a vaginal plug is detected will be called embryonic 0.5 day (E0.5) in the following.

EXAMPLE 3 (Immunoblotting)

[0070] Cultured inferior colliculus cells (explained below) were solubilized in a buffer containing SDS, the proteins contained in this were separated by electrophoresis by SDS-PAGE (12.5% of gel), and were transferred to nitrocellulose membranes (S&S). Nitrocellulose membranes (S&S) are incubated together with blocking reagent at 4°C for 12 hours, followed by the incubation together with bound anti-Plexin-A1 antibodies p1192 for 2 hours. The bound anti-Plexin-A1 antibodies were visualized using anti-Plexin-A1 antibody and biotinylated anti-rat IgG (Amersham) and Elite Kit (Vector laboratories).

EXAMPLE 4 (In situ hybridization)

[0071] In situ hybridization was performed following the reported methods (J. Neurobiol. 29, 1-17, 1996). ³⁵S-labeled antisense and sense cRNA probes are prepared by transcribing from subcloned cDNA fragments (Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 396-402, 1996; Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 524-529, 1996), corresponding to Plexin-A1/564 to 2732bp of ORF, Plexin-A2/ 2233 to 2988 bp of ORF, and Plexin-A3/1296 to 2389bp.

EXAMPLE 5 (Culture of inferior colliculus tissues and inferior colliculus isolated cells)

[0072] Inferior colliculus tissues were extracted from E16.5 mouse embryonic brains in a 30 mm of culture plat where collagen (Cellamatrix; Nitta Gelatin) applied using a DME medium containing 10% of FBS. The inferior colliculus cells were obtained by treating an inferior colliculus tissue using trypsin. The inferior colliculus cells were cultured at the cell density of 5×10^5 per a well of a 24 well plate where PLL (100 µg/ml) and mouse laminin (20 µg/ml; Gibco BRL). To obtain a culture that does not contain neurons, the first cell culture of the second day were separated to single cells with EDTA, and then cultured again afterwards.

EXAMPLE 6 (Transfection of Plexin-A1 cDNA)

[0073] The cDNA encoding full-length mouse Plexin-A1 protein (aa1 to 1894; Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 524-529, 1996) was cloned by a ordinary method, Kozaks sequence (Nucleic Acid Res. 15, 8125-8148, 1987) was inserted before the first ATG, and the products were inserted to a cloning domain of an

expressing vector pCAGGS (Gene 108, 193-199, 1991; provided by Dr. Miyazaki). The cDNA encoding mouse Plexin-A2 proteins (aa18 to 1884; Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 396-402, 1996) and Plexin-A3 proteins (aa20 to 1872; Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 226, 396-402, 1996), and signaling sequences (Neuron 14, 941-948, 1995) and myc-tag (GGEQKLISEEDL) of mouse Sema3A were added to their N-terminals, and then inserted to an expressing vector pCAGGS. To obtain stable transformed cells expressing Plexin-A1 or Plexin-A2, a Plexin-A1 or Plexin-A2 expressing vector and pST-neoB (Mol. Cell. Biol. 7, 2745-2752, 1987) were inserted to L-cells by the calcium phosphate method (Mol. Cell. Biol. 7, 2745-2752, 1987) at the same time, and selected by G418 (GIBCO). To express temporarily Plexin-A2 or Plexin-A3 in a COS7 cell, Plexin-A2 or Plexin-A3 vectors were transfected using Lipofectamine reagent (GIBCO-BRL). The L cells and COS cells were cultured in a DME medium containing 10% of FBS.

EXAMPLE 7 (Production of Sema6C- alkaline phosphatase fusion proteins)

[0074] A sequence of human placenta alkaline phosphatase (AP; Cell 63, 185-194, 1990) were fused to a C-terminal side of the cDNA (the portion corresponding to the 1st to 599th of encoding an extracellular domain of a short splicing variant of a rat Sema6C (Sema6C-S; Mol. Cell. Neurosci. 13, 9-23, 1999), His6-tag sequence (Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, vol. 2, 1996) was located at C-terminal, and then the product was inserted into a mammalian expressing vector pCEP4 (FEBS Lett. 333, 61-66, 1993, Invitrogen). The Sema6C-alkaline phosphatase fusion protein (Sema6C-S-AP) expressing vector were introduced into COS7 cell with a FUGENE6 transfection reagent (Roche), and the fusion protein Sema6C-S-AP was temporarily expressed in the culture supernatant. The culture supernatant was then collected, and Sema6C-S-AP was purified by affinity purification using Ni-NTA column (Qiagen) as previously reported (J. Neurosci. 17, 9163-9193, 1997).

EXAMPLE 8 (Cell surface connectivity of Sema6C-S-AP)

[0075] Plexin-A1 expressing L cells and non-expressing cells (parent strain) was sprayed on a 24-well culture plate (Sumitomo Bakelite). The cells were subject to one-hour incubation on ice together with 250 µl of HBHA solution (Cell 63, 185-194, 1990) containing 1% of FCS and Sema6C-S-AP of various concentrations. After removing HBHA solution, the cells were lysed to 250 µl of lysis (10 mM of tris-HCl, 1% of tritonX-100; pH8.0). The AP activity of the cell lysis was measured by a colorimetric analysis as described previously (Cell 63, 185-194, 1990).

EXAMPLE 9 (Binding of Sema6C against cultured neurons and brains)

[0076] After inferior colliculus tissue cultures or brains obtained from E16.5 mouse embryos were settled by methanol at 0°C for 5 seconds, it is incubated with Sema6C-S-AP at 37°C for one hour. These samples were washed by HBHA buffer 5 times, and the inferior colliculus tissue cultures were fixed again in PBS containing 4% of paraformaldehyde, and the brains were fixed again in PBS containing 50% of acetone and 2% of paraformaldehyde. The samples were washed by PBS, and the inherent AP was inactivated by one-hour incubation at 65°C and they were washed by TBST, and then NBT/BCIP was added to visualize Sema6C-S-AP bound to the samples.

EXAMPLE 10 (Detection of growth cone collapse)

[0077] The dorsal root ganglions (DRG) obtained from E8 chicken embryos and E12.5 mouse embryos were cultured in PPL (100 µg/ml) and laminin (20 µg/ml; Gibco BRL), using a DMA medium containing 10% of FBS and 20 ng/ml of 2.5S NGF (WAKO). The affinity-purified Sema6C-S-AP was added to the chicken DRGs at 20 hours in culture and to the mouse DRGs at 12 hours in culture. After one hour, the cultures were fixed with glutaraldehyde, and the numbers of nerve fibers with collapsed in growth cones were calculated under a microscopic view.

EXAMPLE 11 (Detection of cell morphological change induced by Sema6C)

[0078] The L cells expressing Plexin-A1 the L cells expressing Plexin-A2, and the cells not expressing Plexin (parental L cell) were cultured for 2 days on a 24-well culture plate (2×10⁴ cells/well) with a 1:1 mixture of DMEM containing 10% of FBS and Ham-F12 (Nissui). 165nM of Sema6C-S-AP was added to the cultures at 37°C for one hour, and the cultures product were fixed to measure the size of the cells.

EXAMPLE 12 (Expression of Plexin in the ventral cochlear system)

Example 12-1 Expression of Plexin in an inner ear

[0079] The expression of Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3 in an inner ear was examined by in situ hybridization (ISH) and immunostaining. The result (micrograph) was shown in Fig. 1. Fig. 1A to Fig. 1D show the distributions of mRNAs of Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3 detected by ISH analysis. Fig. 1A and Fig. 1B show the cases of hybridizing a tissue of an inner ear obtained from an E16.5 embryo with cRNA probe of Plexin-A1, and Fig. 1C and Fig. 1D show the cases of hybridizing a tissue of an inner ear with cRNA probe of Plexin-A3, respectively. While

the ISH signaling of Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3 cRNA probe is strong in the spiral ganglion (SG) and the vestibular ganglia (VG), it was weak in the cochlea receptors (CR), the utricle macula (UM), the sacculi macula (SM), and the ampullaris crista (AC) a nonsensory epithelium of the membranous labyrinth (indicated by arrows).

[0080] Fig. 1E to Fig. 1H show the results of immunostaining of the segments of the inner ears obtained from E16.5 embryos by anti-Plexin-A1 antibody p1192. The monoclonal antibody p1192 bound to the spiral ganglia (SG) and their efferent fibers (VGe), and the afferent fibers (SGa), the vestibular ganglia (VG) and their efferent fibers (VGe), the cochlear receptors (CR), the ampullaris crista (AC), the sacculi macula (SM), and nonsensory epithelium in the membranous labyrinth (indicated by an arrow). A scale in Fig. 1A to Fig. 1D indicates 200 µm, and a scale in Fig. 1E to Fig. 1H indicates 100 µm, respectively.

[0081] As mentioned above, in E16.5 embryos, strong ISH signaling of mRNA of Plexin-A1 is detected in the spiral ganglia and the vestibular ganglia (Fig. 1A, B), the immunostaining using a monoclonal antibody p1192 shows that Plexin-A1 proteins are localized in the spiral ganglion and its efferent and afferent fibers, the vestibular ganglia and their fibers (Fig. 1E to H), and while the ISH signaling of mRNA of Plexin-A1 was weak in the vestibular receptors such as the cochlea receptors (organ of corti; Fig. 1E), the ampullaris crista (Fig. 1F), the sacculi macula (Fig. 1H), and the utricle macula, and a nonsensory epithelium in the membranous labyrinth (Fig. 1F). it was found that they were immuned positively to the monoclonal antibody p1192 (see Figs. 1A and B).

On the other hand, while the ISH signaling of mRNA of Plexin-A3 is strong in the spiral ganglion and the vestibular ganglia, but modulated in the membranous labyrinth of E16.5 embryos (Figs. 1C, D). The mRNA transcripts of Plexin-A2 were not detected in the inner ear, and the spiral ganglia and the vestibular ganglion.

Example 12-2: Expression of Plexin in the central auditory path

[0082] The expression of Plexin-A1, Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 in the central auditory path were examined by in situ hybridization (ISH) and immunostaining. The results (micrographs) were shown in Fig. 2. Fig. 2A, Fig. 2C, Fig. 2D and Fig. 2F show the distributions of mRNA of the Plexin-A1 in the brain stem detected by ISH analysis, Fig. 2E shows the distribution of mRNA of Plexin-A2, and Fig. 2B shows the distribution of mRNA of Plexin-A3. Strong ISH signaling with cRNA probe of Plexin-A1 was detected in the cochlear nucleus (CN), regions corresponding to the superior olive nucleus complex and the trapezoid body (So/TB), the ventral lateral lemniscus nucleus (VLL), the inferior colliculus (IC) and medial geniculate body (MGB). mRNA of Plexin-A2 was detected only in the central portion of the inferior colliculus,

and the signaling of Plexin-A3 probe was detected in almost all parts of the brain stem. Further, Fig. 2G show the result of immunostaining of the inferior colliculus coronary segment by a monoclonal antibody p1192, and the antibody bound to the lateral lemniscus (ll), neuropil in the inferior colliculus (asterisk), the brachium of the inferior colliculus (bic) and the commissural fibers of the inferior colliculus (cic). A scale in Fig. 2 indicates 200 μ m, and a scale in Fig. 1E to Fig. 1H indicates 100 μ m, respectively.

[0083] As shown above, the expression of Plexin-A1 is recognized in all the nuclei constituting the central auditory path, and while the ISH signaling with cRNA probe of an E16.5 embryo was detected in dorsal and ventral cochlea nuclei that receive pars cochlearis (Fig. 2A), a region corresponding to an superior olive nucleus complex and a trapezoid body, and ventral and dorsal ciliary body nuclei (Fig. 2C), it was very weak or almost undetectable in ventral nucleus (VN) that receives a ventral nerves (See Fig. 2A). The expression of Plexin-A1 was most remarkable in an inferior colliculus where all the ascending fibers out of an auditory brain stem (lateral lemniscus) converges, or medial lemniscus pulvinar (brachium colliculi inferioris) that receives a fiber from an inferior colliculus (Fig. 2F), almost all the portions of neopallium including an auditory epithelium was expressed (data not shown). Further, a strong immunopositive reaction was recognized in a lateral lemniscus, brachium colliculi inferioris and commissural neurofibers of a inferior colliculus (Fig. 2G). Further, while Plexin-A1 was expressed in all the central nuclei from the mouse auditory paths of 0 day (P0) and 3 day (P3) after birth, it was not expressed in matured mice (data not shown).

[0084] On the other hand, Plexin-A2 was not expressed in an auditory and ventral pathway except for the central portion of an inferior colliculus (Fig. 2E), and the ISH signaling against the mRNA from Plexin-A3 were detected in most portions of CNS (central nervous system) comprising a central nuclear of E16.5 embryos (Fig. 2B) and P0 and P3 mouse auditory and a ventral pathway, it was not detected in adult mice.

EXAMPLE 13 (Expression of Plexin in the olfactory system)

[0085] The olfactory system of vertebrates can be divided to two neuronal paths that are anatomically and functionally different. The expression of Plexin-A1, Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 in the olfactory system are examined by in situ hybridization (ISH) and immunostaining. Fig. 3 shows the result (micrograph), and it is found that the three mouse Plexins show different patterns of expression in the two olfactory paths. A scale in Fig. 3 indicates 200 μ m.

Example 13-1

[0086] Fig. 3A and Fig. 3B show the distribution of mRNA of Plexin-A1 and the distribution of mRNA of Plexin-A3 in segments of nasal cavity coronal of E16.5 embryos, respectively. Strong signaling against both Plexin-A1 probe and Plexin-A3 probe was detected on olfactory epithelium (OE), and the middle level of signaling was detected on an aspiration epithelium. Further, Fig. 3C shows the result of immunostaining of a segment of nasal cavity of E16.5 embryos by a monoclonal antibody p1192, and it was observed that the antibody was bound to an olfactory neural fiber (indicated by an arrow). Further, Fig. 3D and Fig. 3F show the distributions of mRNA of Plexin-A1 in segments of E16.5 embryos and P0 mouse vomeronasal organ (VNO). While the ISH signaling against Plexin-A1 probe and Plexin-A3 probe was detected in a vomeronasal receptor layer (vnr) and a nonsensory epithelium (indicated by an arrow in Fig. 3F and Fig. 3G), it was not detected in supportive cell layer (sc). Further, Fig. 3E shows the result of immunostaining of the segments of a vomeronasal organ of E16.5 embryos and indicates that Plexin-A1 proteins are localized in a vomeronasal nerves (indicated by an arrow).

[0087] As noted above, the ISH signaling against mRNA of Plexin-A1 is detected on sensory epithelium of both nasal cavity (Fig. 3A) and vomeronasal organ (Fig. 3D) of E16.5 embryos, the expression of Plexin-A1 on a vomeronasal sensory epithelium is stronger in P0 mouse (Fig. 3F), and the detection is limited to sensory cell layer rather than supportive cell layer. Further, it was found that Plexin-A1 proteins were localized in olfactory cell fibers (Fig. 3C) and a vomeronasal nervous fiber (Fig. 3E) by immunohistochemistry using an monoclonal antibody p1192. On the other hand, while the ISH signaling of Plexin-A3 against mRNA was found on an E16.5 embryos and olfactory epithelium and vomeronasal epithelium from P0 and P3 mice (Fig. 3B and Fig. 3G), it was restricted to the sensory cell layer in vomeronasal epithelium. Further, while the expression of mRNA by Plexin-A1 and Plexin-A3 does not show any regional difference within the area of vomeronasal sensory epithelium, mRNA of Plexin-A2 was not expressed on olfactory epithelium and vomeronasal epithelium at any examined stage of the development.

Example 13-2: Expression of Plexin in an olfactory bulb.

[0088] Fig. 3H and Fig. 3I show the distributions of mRNA of Plexin-A1 from E16.5 embryos and P3 mouse coronary segments of olfactory bulbs, respectively, and Fig. 3J and Fig. 3K show the distributions of mRNA of Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 in the coronary segments of olfactory bulbs from P3 mouse. While Plexin-A1 was strongly expressed in mitral cells layer (ma) and granule cell layer (gm) of E16.5 embryos, it was strongly expressed in mitral cells layer (ma) and granule cell layer

(gm) of the main olfactory bulb (MOB) (Fig. 3H). Stria olfactoria lateralis constituted from an afferent fiber from the main olfactory bulb and accessory olfactory bulb was positive to the monoclonal antibody p1192 (data not shown). In P0 and P3 mice, while the expression of Plexin-A1 is remarkably decreasing in the main olfactory bulb, it was weak in an accessory olfactory bulb (Fig. 3I). Further, Plexin-A1 mRNA was not detected in a matured olfactory bulb. On the other hand, the expression of Plexin-A2 in an olfactory bulb is almost complementary against the Plexin-A1, the ISH signaling against mRNA of Plexin-A2 was observed in a mitral cell layer (mm) and a tufted filiation cell layer (tf) of the main olfactory bulb (MOB) of E16.5 embryos and P0 and P3 mice, but it was not observed in accessory olfactory bulb (Fig. 3J). Further, the expression of Plexin-A2 in a main olfactory bulb of a matured mouse was weak. On the other hand, Plexin-A3 was expressed in a mitral cell and a granule cell of a main olfactory bulb and in a mitral cell and a granule cell of an accessory olfactory bulb of E 16.5 embryo and P0 and P3 mice (Fig. 3K), they were expressed weakly in mitral cells both a the main olfactory bulb and an accessory olfactory bulb.

Example 13-3: Expression of Plexin in the olfactory path

[0089] Fig.3L to Fig.3N show the distributions of mRNA of Plexin-A1, mRNA of Plexin-A2, and mRNA of Plexin-A3 in coronary segments prepared from a caudal telencephalon of E16.5 embryo, and it was found that the three Plexin shows different patterns of expression in the central nucleus of an olfactory path. That is, the strong signaling of Plexin-A1 against mRNA was detected in the central nucleus of an accessory olfactory bulb, such as a posterior cortex amygdaloidal nucleus (Pco) and a ventral amygdaloidal nucleus, but it was not detected in the nucleus of a main olfactory pathway (Fig. 3L). On the other hand, the ISH signal against Plexin-A2 was detected in the central nucleus of the main olfactory path such as a ventral olfactory, a piriform cortex (Pir), an olfactory infield cortex and a lateral amygdaloidal nucleus (La), and it was not detected in the nucleus of an accessory olfactory bulb (Fig. 3M). Plexin-A3 was detected in all the central olfactory nuclei in both of the main olfactory path and a subolfactory pathway (Fig. 3N). Further, the three expression patterns of Plexin in the central olfactory nucleus were the same as the ones in the 16.5 embryos. While the ISH signaling of Plexin-A2 and Plexin-A3 against mRNA was detected in the central nucleus of main olfactory path, the ISH signaling of mRNA of Plexin-A1 was not detected.

Example 14: Identification of Sema6C as a ligand for Plexin-A1

[0090] In order to gain further insights on the function of a ligand in the development of the nervous system, it is essential to identify the identification of a ligand that

interacts with Plexin, and to screen such a ligand, a transfectant expressing Plexin-A1 was obtained by transfecting a L cell with cDNA of a full-length mouse Plexin-A1, following the method described in Example 6. Fig. 4A and Fig. 4B show the results of immunohistochemistry of a L cell expressing Plexin-A1 using an anti-Plexin-A1 antibody p1192, and a L cell not expressing Plexin-A1 as a control. Since the antibody is bound only to the surface of a L cell expressing Plexin-A1, it was confirmed that Plexin-A1 was localized on the surface of a cell of a transfectant.

[0091] Next, secretory and transmembrane semaphorins bound to a transfectant expressing Plexin-A1 were screened, and it was confirmed that Sema6C bound to Plexin-A1 in the following way. First, to carry out an experiment of binding Plexin-A1, a recombinant protein (Sema6C-S-AP) was prepared with an AP-tag at the extracellular domain of an isoform (Sema6C-S) lacking a region of 32 amino acids among two splicing isoforms with or without 32 amino acids of an extracellular domain of Sema6C. The Sema6C-S-AP and the transfectants (an L cell expressing Plexin-A1) were used to perform a binding experiment. Fig. 4C shows that Sema6C-S-AP strongly bound to a cell not expressing Plexin-A1 (parent cell), and Fig. 4D shows that it does not strongly bind to a L cell not expressing Plexin-A1 (parent strain) as a contrast. A scale in Fig. 4A to D indicates 100 μ m.

[0092] Further, following the method described in Example 8, a quantitative analysis regarding the binding of Sema6C-S-AP against Plexin-A1 were carried out. Fig. 4E shows the result. In Fig. 4E, the AP activity caused by the non-specific binding with a Plexin-A1 non-expressing L cell was subtracted to obtain the specific binding of Sema6C-S-AP against Plexin-A1. Further, Scatchard Plot derived from the data in Fig. 4E was shown in Fig. 4F, and presumptive dissociation constant (K_D) of binding of Plexin-A1 with Sema6C-S-AP was 16.5nM. Further, the binding of Sema6C-S-AP with Plexin-A1 was not blocked neither by the monoclonal antibody p1192 nor the antiserum against Plexin-A1 recombinant protein. Further, Sema6C-S-AP did not bind to a PCOS 7 cell expressing Plexin-A2 or Plexin-A3, and it did not bind to an L cell expressing neuropilin-1. An extracellular domain such as AP fusion Sema3A (Cell 90, 753-762, 1997), AP fusion Sema4C (M-Sema F; FEBS lett. 370, 269-272, 1995) or AP fusion Sema4D (M-Sema G; J/ Biol. Chem. 271, 33376-33381, 1996) or a fusion protein of immunoglobulin Fc region and AP were not bound to a cell expressing Plexin-A1.

EXAMPLE 15: (Binding of Sema6C against neurons)

[0093] To confirm that Sema6C is bound to a natural Plexin-A1 protein expressed in a neuron, E16 mouse embryonic inferior colliculus isolated cell was prepared following the method described in Example 5. The primary cultured cells obtained by two-day culture con-

tained a number of neurons. Further, the second culture was carried out from the first culture to prepare the ones that do not contain neurons but contain a number of glial cells. When immunoblotting was performed for the cells using a monoclonal antibody p1192, p1192 positive bands considered to be Plexin-A1 protein at 180kDa was detected in the lysis of an inferior primary culture containing a number of neurons (the asterisk in lane 1 of Fig. 5A) while it was not detected in the second culture that does not contain neurons but contains glial cells (Fig. 5A lane 2). These results show that Plexin-A1 is expressed in a neuron but not in a glial cell. Further, immunostaining against an inferior colliculus explant culture of E16.5 embryo by a monoclonal antibody p1192 revealed that an inferior colliculus fragment (the asterisk in Fig. 5B), axons (the arrow in Fig. 5B) and growth cone (the arrowhead in Fig. C) is immunopositive against a monoclonal antibody p1192, and it was shown that most of the inferior colliculus neurons express Plexin-A1.

[0094] Next, Fig. 5D (bright-field image) and Fig. 5E (phase-contrast image) show the results of examination of the binding of Sema6C-S-AP to the inferior colliculus segments. These results show that while Sema6C-S-AP is bound to an explant containing neurons (asterisk) and an axon, it does not bind to a non-neuronal cell (arrowhead). Sema6C-S-AP was not bound to a cultured anterior colliculus neurons that do not express Plexin-A1 (see Fig.2D). Further, Fig. 5F and Fig. 5G show the results of binding of Sema6C-S-AP and AP (10nM) against an dissected E16.5 embryonic brain. A remarkable amount of Sema6C-S-AP was detected at the regions where a large amount of Plexin-A1 proteins in an dissected brain obtained from an E16.5 embryo, that is, an auditory nervous nucleus and fascicles containing acoustic radiation out of a lateral lemniscus (II), inferior colliculus (IC), brachium of the inferior colliculus (bic), medial geniculate body (MGB). A scale in Fig. 5B is 100 μm , Fig. 5C is 50 μm , Fig. 5D and Fig. 5E are 250 μm , and Fig. 5F and Fig. 5G is 1mm.

Example 16 (Growth cone collapse induced by Sema6C)

[0095] Affinity-purified Sema6C-S-AP was added to an explant culture of dorsal root ganglion (DRG) neurons obtained from an E8 chicken embryo and an E12.5 mouse embryo and obtained from an E16.5 mouse embryo, and was treated at 37°C for an hour, and the growth cone collapse activity of Sema6C was measured following the description in Example 10. Fig. 6A to Fig. 6C show each of the results. As shown in Fig. 6A (an average percent of the growth cone collapse obtained by three independent tests), Sema6C-S-AP causes the collapse of growth cone in a dose-dependent fashion on a chicken embryonic DRG, almost 100% of the growth cone collapse was observed by adding 165 nM. In contrast, as shown in Fig. 6B and Fig. 5C (average percent obtained from three independent tests from each other),

when the same amount (165 nM) of Sema6C (black column) or a contrastive buffer (Cont; empty column; 10mM of HEPES containing 1% of FBS; a dialytic buffer against Sema6C-S-AP recombinant protein) was added to the culture (Fig. 6B; $p=0.001$), Sema6C-S-AP induced 50% of the growth cone collapse bind a mouse embryonic DRG neuron (Fig.6B; $p=0.001$), and 20% of the growth cone collapse was observed in Sema6C-S-AP against a cultured inferior colliculus neuron (Fig. 6C; $p=0.001$).

EXAMPLE 17 (Cell shrinkage induced by Sema6C)

[0096] To examine whether Plexin-A1 can transmit a signaling induced by Sema6C into a cell, morphology of a cell was observed following the method described in Example 11, by adding Sema6C-S-AP to a cell expressing Plexin-A1, a cell expressing Plexin-A2 and an L cell not expressing Plexin. Fig. 7 shows the morphological change of each cell after one-hour culture at 37°C by adding 165nM of Sema6C-S-AP or a contrastive buffer (a dialytic buffer for Sema6C-S-AP) to a cell expressing Plexin-A1, a cell expressing Plexin-A2 and a cell not expressing Plexin. Fig. 7A and Fig. 7B show the result (Phase-Contrast Microscope) of cells expressing Plexin A1 treated by Sema6C-S-AP or treated by a contrastive buffer, and Fig. 7C to Fig. 7E show that the result of the quantitative analysis regarding the cell size of a cell expressing Plexin-A1, a cell expressing Plexin-A2 and a cell not expressing Plexin that were treated by Sema6C-S-AP or by a contrastive buffer was shown by plotting a cell percent of a square smaller than $25 \times 25 \mu\text{m}^2$ ($625 \mu\text{m}^2$), $50 \times 50 \mu\text{m}^2$ ($2,500 \mu\text{m}^2$) and $100 \times 100 \mu\text{m}^2$ ($10,000 \mu\text{m}^2$). Each point indicated in Fig.7C to Fig. 7E is an average percent of 9 independent regions obtained by 3 wells. A scale in Fig.7A and Fig. 7B represents 50 μm .

[0097] 165nM of Sema6C-S-AP enough to induce a complete collapse of the growth cone of chicken DRG neurons (see Fig. 6A) was added to a cell expressing Plexin-A1, and fixed at 37°C for an hour. The measurement of the cell size revealed that they remarkably shrank (Fig. 7A). Further, semi-quantitative measurement of the cell size showed that the size of a cell expressing Plexin-A1 remarkably shrank by Sema6C-S-AP (Fig. 7C). Even a cell expressing Plexin-A2 (Fig. 7D) or a cell not expressing Plexin (Fig. 7E) was treated by the same amount (165nM) of Sema6C-S-AP, no morphological change was recognized. From the results that while Sema6C-S-AP induced a shrinkage of the size of an L cell expressing Plexin-A1, it did not induce a shrinkage of an L cell expressing Plexin-A2 or an L cell not expressing Plexin, it was confirmed that a signaling induced by Sema6C was transmitted into a cell by the specific interaction of Sema6C against Plexin-A1.

EXAMPLE 18 (Screening of an antagonist of Sema6C using a cell expressing Plexin-A1)

[0098] An antagonist of Sema6C can be screened by adding further target substances to the binding experiments of Sema6C-S-AP to a cell expressing Plexin-A1, described in Example 14. That is, the use of Sema6C-S-AP prepared by the method described in Example 7 and the transformant expressing a Plexin-A1 protein prepared by the method described in Example 6 on the surface of the cell, and the connectivity of the Sema6C-S-AP to the expressing cell was detected by the alkaline phosphatase activity, and select a target substance wherein the AP activity is lower in (ii) than (i), or there is no AP activity in cases of (i) when Sema6C-S-AP was added, and (ii) Sema-S-AP and a target substance were added, against the cell expressing Plexin-A1.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

[0099] The present invention provides a screening method for an agonist or an antagonist of Sema6C using Plexin-A1, or a screening tool for the screening tool. Further, since Sema6C has a growth cone collapse activity against a nervous cell and a contractile activity against a cell, an agonist or antagonist of Sema6C obtained by a screening method of the present invention is useful as agents for treating or preventing the diseases caused by the lack or excessive expression of Sema6C

the marker protein is alkaline phosphatase or an immunoglobulin Fc domain.

5. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein a cell membrane or a cell expressing a protein with an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is used.
6. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 5, wherein a cell membrane or a cell expressing a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is a transformed cell wherein the DNA encoding a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is preserved in a stable manner.
7. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 6 wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is a recombinant protein.
8. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 7, wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is Plexin-A1.
9. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 2 to 8, comprising a step of detecting the presence or absence of a signaling arising from an interaction between a protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C and a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1.

Claims

1. A screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C, comprising a step of making a protein with an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 contact with a target substance in vitro.
2. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 1, comprising a step of comparing and evaluating (i) a case of making a recombinant protein with an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C contact with a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 with (ii) a case of making a recombinant protein with an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C and a target substance, or a target substance contact with a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1.
3. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to either of claim 1 or 2, wherein the protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C is a protein bound to a marker protein and/or a peptide tag.
4. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 3, wherein
10. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 9, wherein the signaling is a connectivity of a protein having an extracellular domain of Semaphorin 6C against a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin A1, a growth cone collapse activity, or a contractile activity of a Plexin-A1 expressing cell.
11. A screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C, comprising a step of injecting a target substance to non-human animals and evaluating Plexin-A1 activity.
12. A screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C comprising a step of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and evaluating the Plexin-A1 activity.
13. A screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C, wherein the target substance is injected to non-human animals whose gene function

- encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and its Plexin-A1 activity is assessed and compared with that of wild-type non-human animals.
14. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 11 to 13, wherein the Plexin-A1 activity is a growth cone collapse activity against a neural cell or a contractile activity against cells.
 15. The screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 11 to 14, wherein the non-human animals are mice or rats.
 16. An agonist or for Semaphorin 6C obtainable by a screening method for agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to any of claims 1 to 15.
 17. A pharmacological composition comprising the agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 16 as an active agent.
 18. The pharmacological composition according to claim 17, useful as an agent for treating and/or preventing auditory and/or olfactory nervous diseases.
 19. A migration-inhibition agent or migration-enhancement agent of Plexin-A1 comprising the agonists or antagonists for Semaphorin 6C according to claim 16 as an active agent.
 20. A fusion protein wherein a protein having an extracellular domain of Class 6 Semaphorin is bound with a marker protein and/or a peptide tag.
 21. The fusion protein according to claim 20, wherein a Class 6 Semaphorin is Semaphorin 6C.
 22. The fusion protein according to either of claim 20 or 21, wherein the marker protein is alkaline phosphatase or an immunoglobulin Fc domain.
 23. A transformant wherein DNA encoding a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 is preserved stably.
 24. A probe used for diagnosing central nervous diseases, comprising whole or part of an antisense strand of DNA or RNA encoding Plexin-A1.
 25. The probe used for the diagnosis according to claim 24, wherein the central nerve is an auditory nerve.
 26. A medicine used for diagnosing central nervous diseases, comprising the diagnostic probe according to claim 24 or an antibody to Plexin-A1.
 27. The medicine used for diagnosing auditory nervous diseases according to claim 26, wherein a central nerve is an auditory nerve.
 28. A screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of culturing in vitro a cell expressing a protein having an extracellular domain of Plexin-A1 in the presence of the target substance and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression in the cell.
 29. A screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of culturing in vitro a cell obtained from non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or is excessively expressed in the presence of a target substance, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression in the cell.
 30. A screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression.
 31. A screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacked or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression.
 32. A screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, comprising steps of injecting a target substance to non-human animals whose gene function encoding Plexin-A1 is lacking or excessively expressed on the chromosome, and measuring and evaluating the amount of Plexin-A1 expression with that of wild-type non-human animals.
 33. The screening method for agents inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to any of claims 29 to 32 wherein the non-human animal is mice or rats.
 34. An agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1, obtained by the screening methods for an agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to any of claims 28 to 33.
 35. A pharmacological composition comprising the agent inhibiting or promoting the expression of Plexin-A1 according to claim 34 as an active agent.

FIG. 1

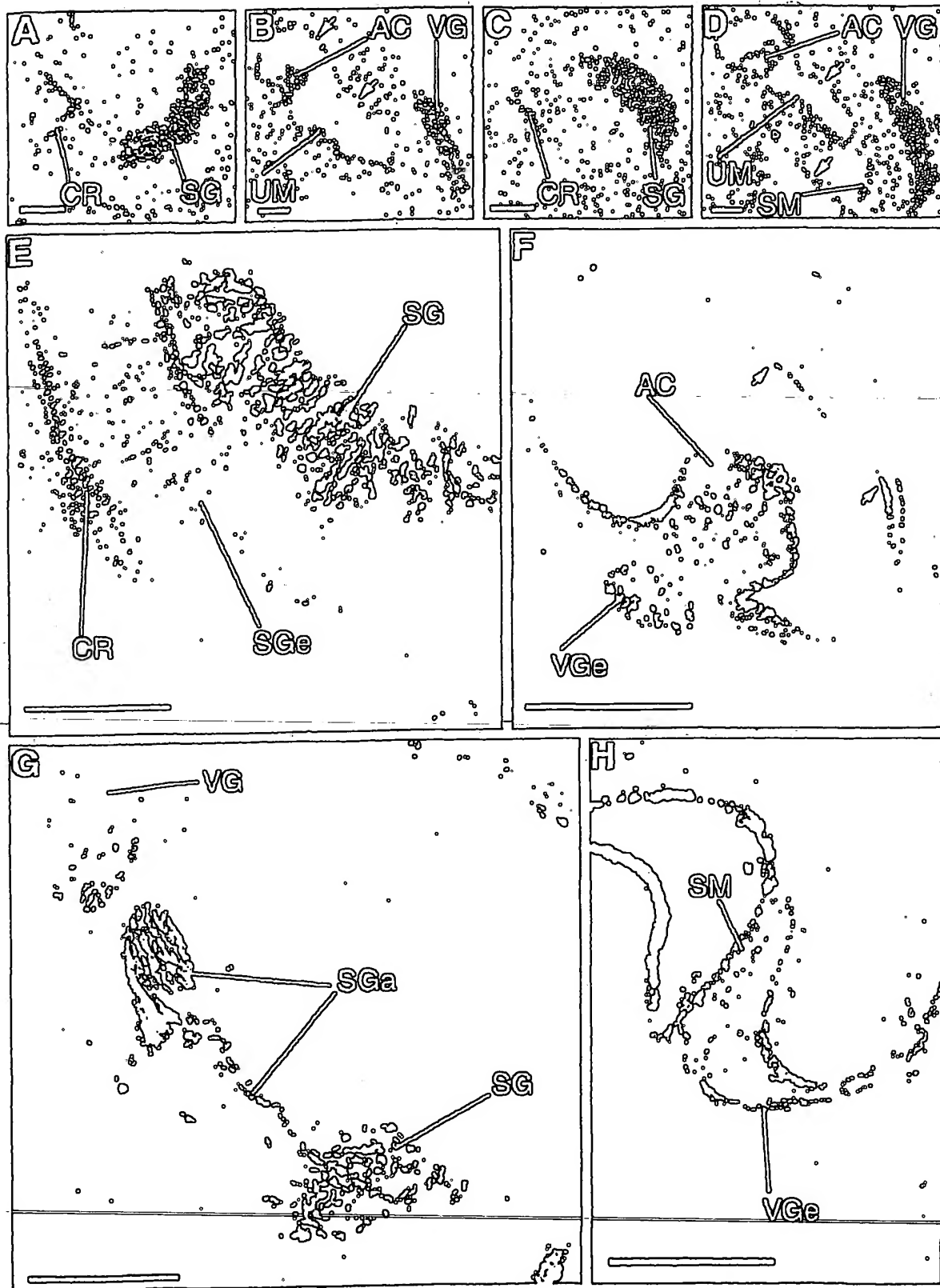


FIG. 2

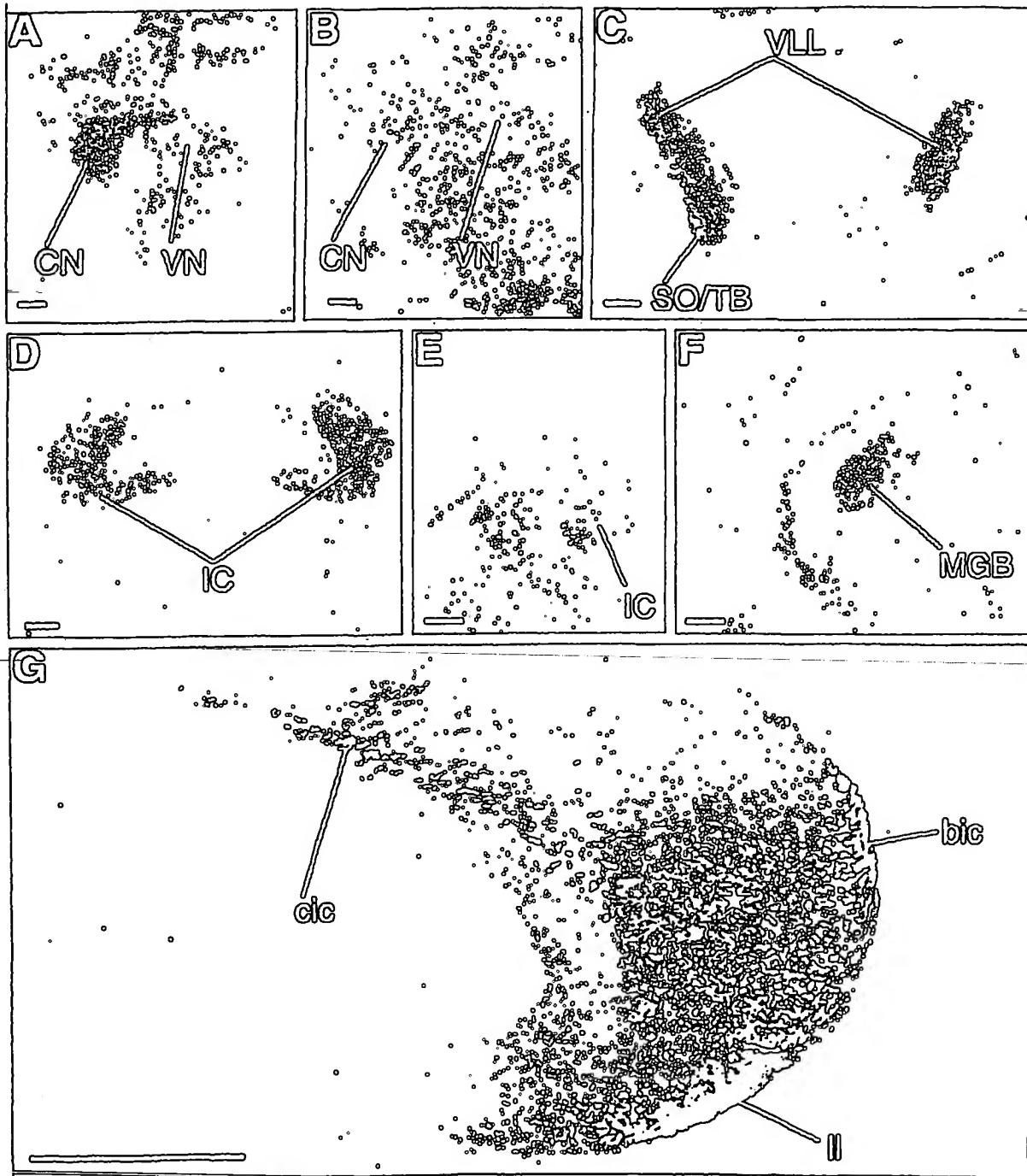


FIG. 3

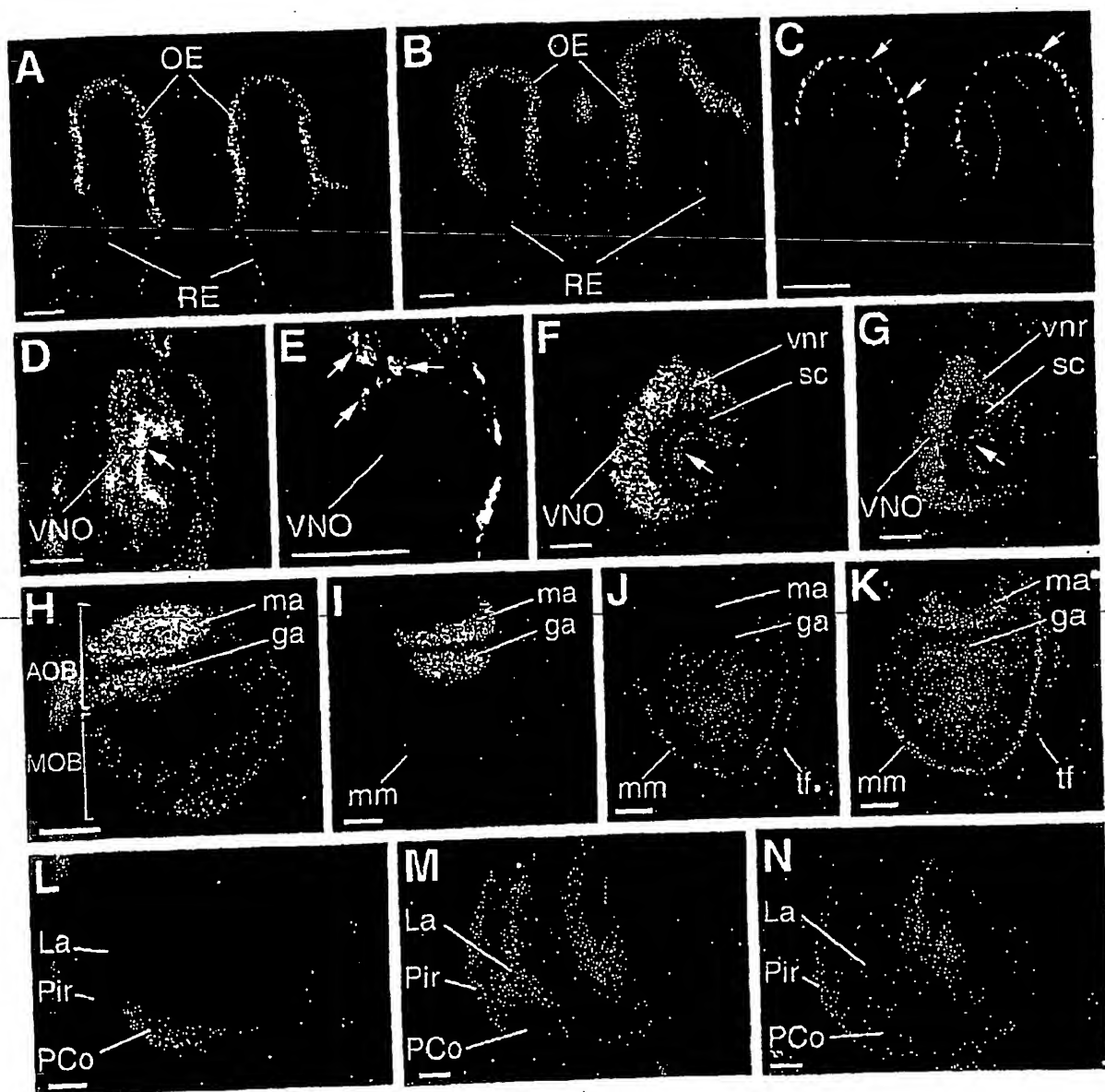


FIG. 4

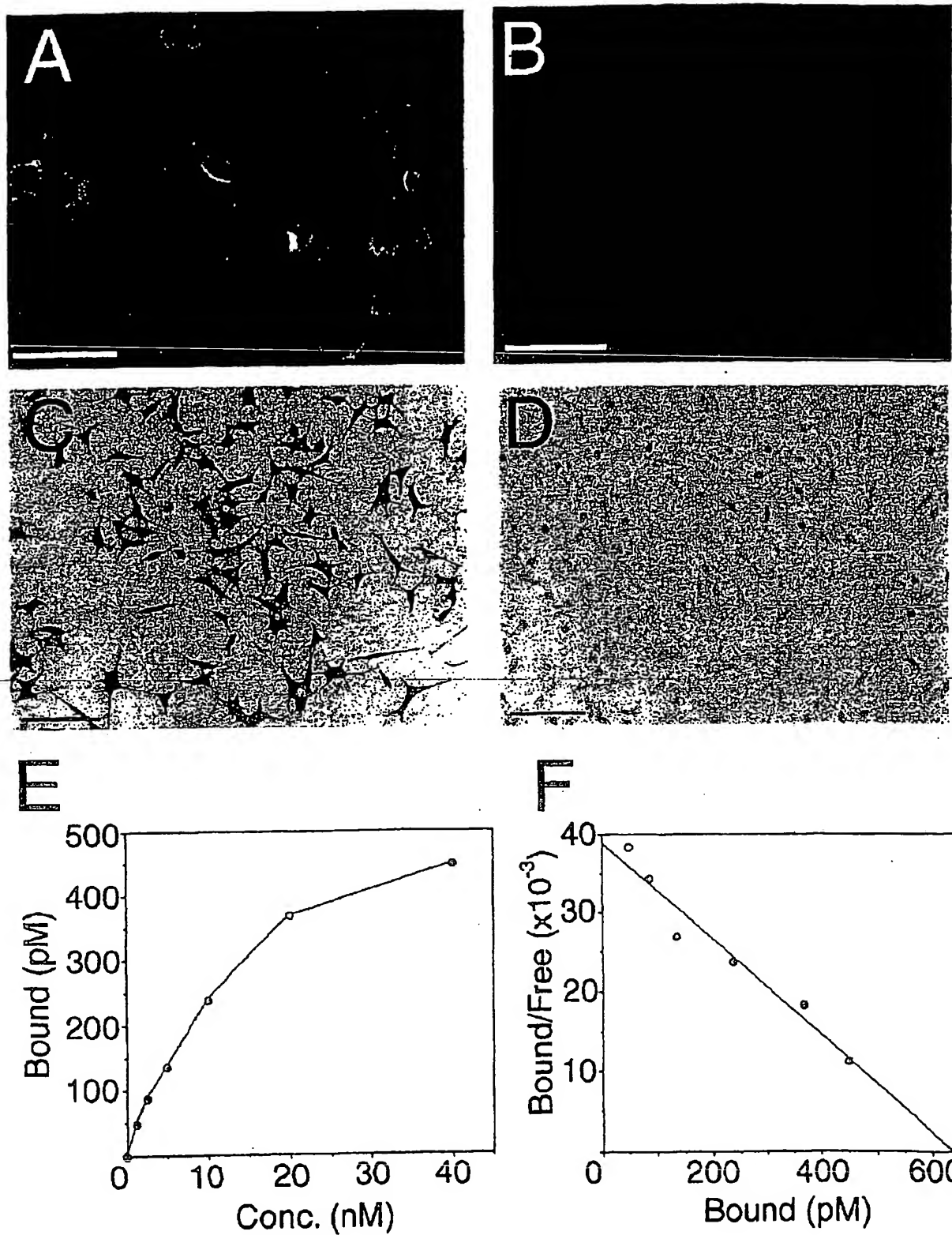


FIG. 5

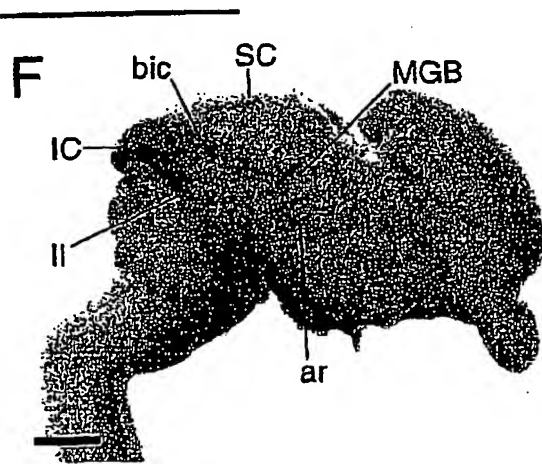
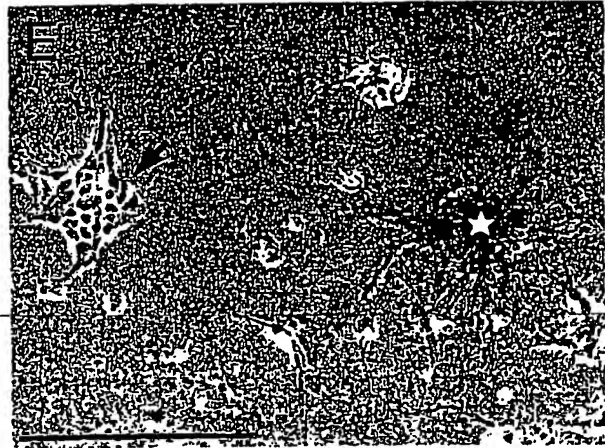
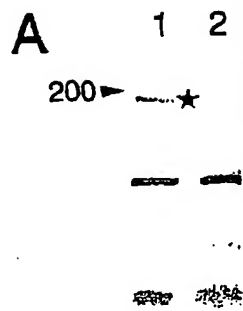


FIG. 6

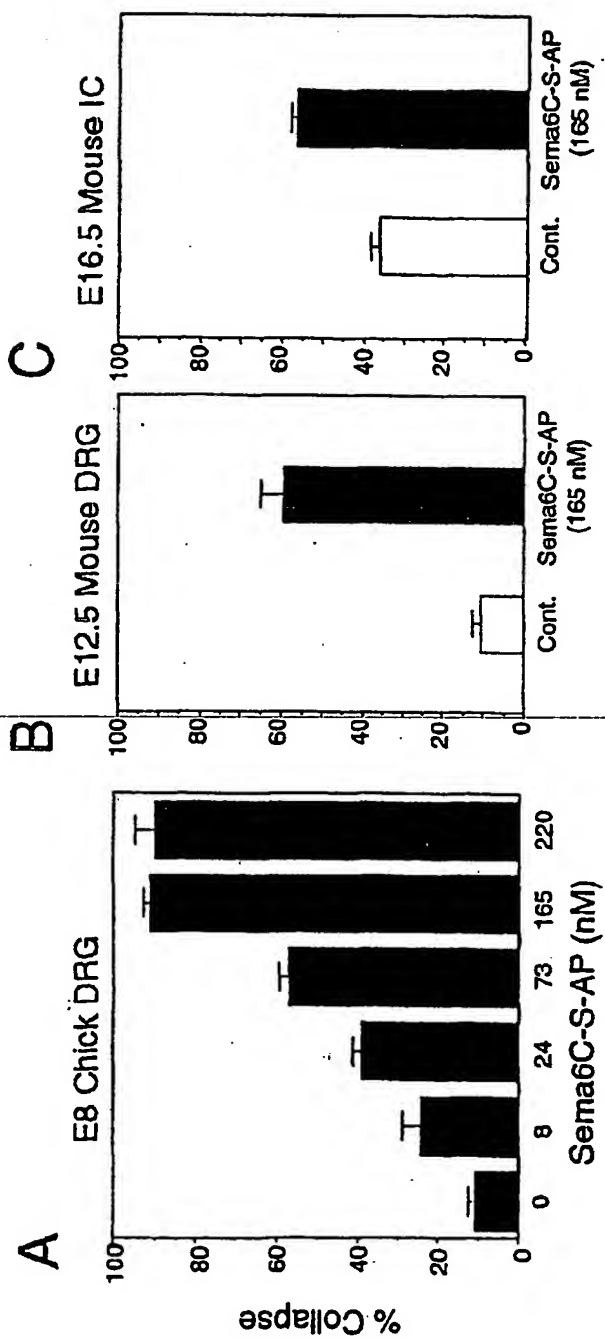
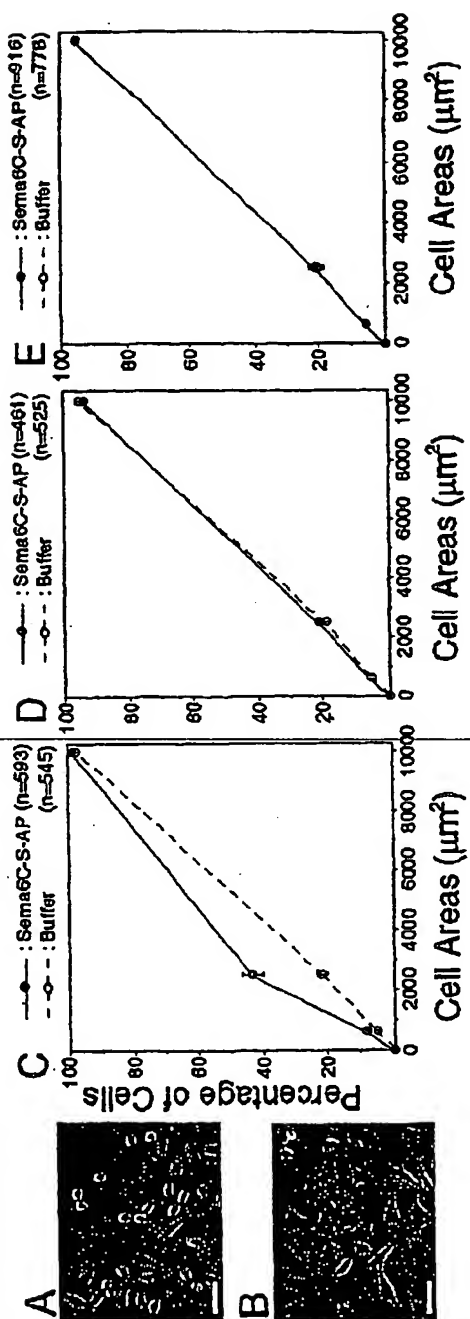


FIG. 7



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP00/08329

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int.Cl⁷ C12N15/09, 15/11, 5/10, C12Q1/02, 1/68, C07K14/47, 19/00, A61K45/00, A61P43/00, 25/02, A61P27/02, 27/16, A61K38/02, G01N33/50, 33/15, 33/566

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Int.Cl⁷ C12N15/00-15/90, C12Q1/00-1/70, G01N33/15, 33/50-33/98

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

BIOSIS/MEDLINE/WPI (STN)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	Cell, 99(1), Oct. 1999	23-24, 26, 28-33
Y	Paolo M. Comoglio et al., "Plexins are a large family of receptors for transmembrane, secreted, and GPI-anchored Semaphorins in Vertebrates", pp. 71-80	1-15, 25, 27
A		20-22
X	Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications, 226, 1996 Toshiki Kameyama et al., "Identification of a neuronal cell surface molecule, Plexin, in mice", pp. 524-529	23-24, 26, 28-33
Y		1-15, 25, 27
A		20-22
X	WO, 9811216, A1 (SUMITOMO PHARM CO LTD),	20-22
Y	19 March, 1998 (19.03.98)	1-15
A	& EP, 960937, A1	23-33
X	Molecular and Cellular Neuroscience, 13(1), Jan. 1999	20-22
Y	Toru Kimura et al., "Cloning and characterization of a novel class VI semaphorin, Semaphorin Y", pp. 9-23	1-15
A		23-33
Y	Kouji Nou Kinou no Bunshi Kikou Kamei ni muketa Kiban	24-27
A	Gijutsu no Kaihatsu ni kansuru Kenkyu (the 1 st period : 1995-1997)	1-15, 20-23, 28-33

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search
15 February, 2001 (15.02.01)Date of mailing of the international search report
27 February, 2001 (27.02.01)Name and mailing address of the ISA/
Japanese Patent Office

Authorized officer

Facsimile No.

Telephone No.

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PCT/JP00/08329

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
	Seika Houkokusho, Kagaku Gijutsuchou Kenkyuu Kauhatsu kyoku, March, 1999, pp.119-136	

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP00/08329

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
2. ☒ Claims Nos.: 16-19,34-35
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

With respect to the semaphorin 6C agonist or antagonist and the plexin A1 expression inhibitor or promoter, no particular compounds are disclosed in the description (Examples, etc.). It is not described too that what compounds are included in the scope. Thus, it is completely unknown what compounds are included therein and thus the inventions as set forth in the claims are not stated in such a manner as enabling the performance of meaningful international search.
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

There are two or more groups of invention as follows:
Claims 1 to 19: methods of screening a semaphorin 6C agonist or antagonist by using plexin A1 and the agonist or antagonist thus obtained.
Claims 20 to 22: fused proteins of class 6 type semaphorin.
Claim 23: a transformant sustaining a DNA encoding a protein having the extracellular domain of plexin A1 in a stable state.
Claims 24 to 27: diagnostic probes originating in plexin A1.
Claims 28 to 35: methods of screening a plexin A1 expression inhibitor or promoter and the expression inhibitor or promoter thus obtained.

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☒ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

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